

*Family Worship in Christ Today*

Father's Day

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*He said unto him, 'God home to your friends, and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he as had mercy on you. [Mark 5:19]*

I was told a story that I would like to share. It was about a Presbyterian minister and a Catholic priest. A Presbyterian minister had been brought up in a very strict Christian home and for the most part, he carried the childhood values into his adult life. He had grown up in a rural part of the country and had always loved horses, but he had never been to a race track to see our real horse race, because he was taught to stay away from such places, because if he went there he would be tempted to gamble, and the Catechism he had learned, stated that, "*temptation is sin*". But his heart never stopped yearning to watch a horse race that was for real! One day while he was visiting in a community far from his home where he felt no one would know that he was a minister, the urge to see the horse races overtook him, so he decided it would be OK if he went to the track, vowing to himself that he was only going to "*see*" the horses race. He vowed that he had absolutely no intention to spend any money other than to get in, and definitely he is not going to bet. He was just going to watch the races. While the race was getting ready, he went down to the paddock to see the horses up close and he noticed a Catholic priest saying prayers over a particular horse. A few minutes later, the race was run, and that horse won. This happened over and over again. After about five or six times the minister thought it through and went down to see which horse the priest would say prayers over before the next race. He went directly to the betting window and put down every dollar in his pocket on the horse, vowing that if he won, of course he was going to give 10% to his church. The race started off as normal and his horse was going just great. The horse took the lead and was halfway around the track ahead of the rest of the pack when suddenly the horse threw the rider off, fell over, and died. The minister was in a panic, so he went to see the priest to inquire what happened. He asked why the other races went so well and each horse he blessed automatically won. What went wrong this time? The priest laughed. He turned to him and said, you must be a protestant! The minister confirmed that he was protestant, and then the priest told him that is why he lost his money, because as a protestant, he didn't know the difference between a blessing and the Last Rites.

Many people who want to be known as Christians are all too often caught in this dilemma. We all know the basic rules of the road and what we have been taught, but our hearts keep yearning for something more. And in order to get what we want, we will go to almost any limit to twist the rules and create the opportunity to do our deeds where no one will see or know us. And like the minister in the story, we will explain our activities and our motives away so that we may give ourselves a clear conscience. It isn't really gambling, because it is a sure thing, and so on. We often think we know enough about ourselves and the other person that we become so sure that we will win. We will be in control. And so, we all too often think that no one will get hurt.

It is this kind of attitude in the Christian life that has weakened the present-day Church. Many people have told me that they feel their lives are okay because they go to church often enough, and they live pretty good lives. They pay their taxes, they don't steal from the supermarket, nor do they go about murdering people. The state of affairs is this: we try to be practical atheists, and

we tell ourselves and others this until we actually believe that God doesn't make much of a difference anyway.

A friend of mine went to Los Angeles and while there went to visit a minister friend at his church. On the way out of the church he looked across the street and noted a beautiful shopping centre that has been completely abandoned. He noted that there was a supersized For Sale sign on the roof. He inquired as to why this unusual situation came to be and was told that the shopping centre had gone bankrupt along with many of the small shop tenants. He said that it was public knowledge that a developer specialist had warned the developer not to build the centre the way he did. The key problem was that there was no anchor or major store. This is the same problem facing many of our congregations today and many of our Christian friends' lives. You cannot build a church around a cluster of activities or groups of people unless there is something central. Neither can you grow a strong Christian life around a cluster of events here and there when there is no strong central purpose to the whole. The man who built the shopping centre wanted to make a lot of money and he hoped that everything would work out. Every Christian wants to go to heaven but too many just hope that things will simply work out.

From my earliest childhood, as a little boy I knew about Jesus. He was always a real person to me and it was important to me that I will one day go to heaven. It was the practice of my parents to have worship in our home. My mother and father took turns reading the Bible daily and the supper hour was the time we reviewed our Catechism questions and Sunday School memory work. Prayer was something that did not come quickly or easily to me. I always felt I could pray much better on my own, especially if I could do it quietly. But with the help of my parents, my minister, my Sunday school teachers, and the Lord's blessing, I was eventually able to lead in public prayer.

The family worship experiences of reading the Bible together, praying and talking, hearing my parents in prayer, and seeing them in the prayer posture have never been forgotten. One of the great tragedies of our day is that so many are neglecting this all-important practice. The lack of recognition of God in the home, the failure to pray together as a family, is without question the greatest contribution to our present-day community, national and international unrest. There can never be security, peace, and harmony, except we as individuals and families recognize and worship God in spirit and in truth. No matter what we may call ourselves, what we are in the wider circles of life depends on what we are in the intimacy of our hearts and homes. A person who does not have a life of prayer will never be able to be a spiritual blessing to others and lead them to the gates of heaven. One who does not practice the secrets of the Lord in their heart and home cannot sincerely proclaim them from the rooftop. Paul said to Timothy, *if you do anything for children or grandchildren, let them learn first to show piety at home, and to respect their parents: for that is good and acceptable before God (1 Timothy 5:4)*. Jesus emphasized home worship when He instructed the healed demonic: *go home to your friends and tell them the great things the Lord has done for you (Mark 5:19)*.

I want to call your attention for a moment to the word, "patrimony". It is something we received from our parents. It is important that parents teach their children to do housework, to clean themselves, to earn a living, understand our country, our government, how to handle money, and

so on. However, if we are going to give them advantages in all these things, we must also give them the advantages of what we receive from God. A child's onward march and upward climb toward life's larger meaning ought to be inspired by Godly parents. They should be inspired by parents who pray and read their Bible daily and who are faithful to God. The collective membership of the congregation needs to be behind and beside all parents who present their child to Baptism and share the vows that they and the congregation make time and time again.

I regret that many adults look at today's youth and say that the world is upside down. Many adults say that they think young people are lazy and have no respect for their country or fellow beings. Why is there turmoil on campuses, destruction of property and a seeming disregard for human life? What does it all mean? I firmly believe that it means that many parents have forgotten God and are now sending their children out of the home into life without the sense or conscience of God. Many of our youth today are leaving their family homes as spiritual paupers.. Some of them have been Baptized, some have attended a few hours of Sunday school over the years. Worship in the home is as old as the record of the home itself. *God blessed Noah and his sons...* And of Abraham and his family, it is recorded, *...and he built there an altar unto Jehovah.*

Broken homes and children who become a disappointment to their parents can and do come from homes where Christ is important to one or more members of the family. But we cannot expect spiritual assistance to grow and flower unless we put our very best into it. It is necessary for every person in the home to learn that there should be a commitment to Jesus Christ. If this is not part of the home life and family worship discipline, how then do we expect our children to grow to maturity as wholesome adults and make a decision to follow and serve Christ? The whole of Christian living and the Christian story cannot be learned in one hour a week every now and then. Imagine if a child went to public or high school for a few hours during their maturing years. The early Christian churches established by Paul in Corinth and Ephesus were established in the home. We read in the Epistles how one person came and was baptized and then was followed by the other members of the house. The procedure for family worship is basically two things: Bible reading, and prayer. If you will be diligent to your family before God, He has promised that He will bless each person with the Holy Spirit.

I want to conclude by noting one point to keep in mind about worship in the home, is regularity. Many people have said to me, *we used to worship every week and we used to say grace before our meals, but we kind of got out of the habit.* I have never heard anyone successful say, *we used to go to work regularly but we kind of got out of the habit.* Schedules are difficult, and the demands of life have brought the tragedy of discontinuance. There is nothing more important in this world than for you to have worship in the home and to present it every day to each member of the family, including your children, grandchildren, spouse, siblings, and friends. Each one must be disciplined with a conscience of the presence of God Almighty. It must be mutually understood that it is a necessary daily exercise and responsibility, just as much as eating good food regularly. Come what may it is not something to be inserted or omitted according to the temperament or the urgency of the moment or the day.

May God grant that you and your family will be the centre of Christian worship in your home. This will prove to be an immeasurable blessing not only to you and your family, but to all humanity. The living presence of the Lord Jesus Christ in hearts and lives is a means of regeneration of individuals in communion. It is my prayer that in the spirit of a new consecration to God, you will pledge yourselves anew to this great relationship with Christ and your family. Happy Father's Day to all fathers, grand-fathers and great grand-fathers. Amen.